

NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
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Child support enforcement pilot project to address parent layoffs

BISMARCK, N.D. – Parents who pay child support and have been recently laid off through no fault of their own may get some temporary relief through a pilot project now underway in North Dakota. The project will offer parents temporary relief from their court-ordered obligations along with job placement help. Several legislators proposed the idea, which involves the North Dakota Department of Human Services' Child Support Enforcement Division, the courts, and Job Service North Dakota.

Sen. Judy Lee, R-West Fargo, and Rep. Robin Weisz, R-Hurdsfield, met with representatives of the courts and human services in March. The resulting plan helps maintain support to children but temporarily adjusts the support and provides job placement help and short-term enforcement relief. The project also includes steps for returning the support obligation to previous levels when the parent goes back to work.

“This is an issue. People are laid off through no fault of their own and have lower incomes, but their support remains the same. They have to decide whether to pay support for their children, or buy groceries, pay rent or the mortgage or else go into arrears and face those consequences,” Weisz said.

Lee said, “If the family lived together and a parent was laid off, the family would make do with less until the parent could go back to work. This project is based on the same principle, only the parents don't live together.”

Mike Schwindt, Director of the Child Support Enforcement program said the program is for parents with a history of working and supporting their children, and who, for reasons outside of their control, have been either permanently or temporarily laid-off or had their work hours significantly cut.

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“We urge these parents to contact their caseworker for help in managing their child support obligation through the transition. Our goal is to keep some support flowing to children, while providing help to responsible parents who find themselves in a tough spot,” Schwindt said.

He said when a parent applies for unemployment, Job Service North Dakota information will be used to notify the parent that he or she can apply for an expedited hearing on modifying support. Child support staff will prioritize the case to pursue a change in obligation by using the most recent income data and filing a motion with the court for a modification. Where possible, enforcement tools, such as interest accrual and administrative license suspension will be put on hold.

In appropriate cases, noncustodial parents will be referred to the PRIDE program, a multi-agency effort that connects noncustodial parents to specialized Job Service North Dakota staff who work with parents to improve their employment opportunities, he said.

Custodial parents will be informed of the hearing to discuss modification of the support order. If support is adjusted, parents will also receive information about assistance programs.

Schwindt said no decisions have been made yet about how long the pilot project will be available to parents. It may be refined based on feedback as child support enforcement staff members work with parents, the court system, and Job Service North Dakota.

North Dakota’s Child Support Program establishes and enforces child support and medical support obligations, establishes paternity, and reviews court orders for potential modification. For information about child support enforcement services, visit www.childsupportnd.com.

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